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ABSTRACT

The National Library of Australia has a small but interesting collection of rare books and manuscripts. These collections are the legacy of a remarkable period of growth in the library's history. Strengths are greatest in British and European materials, particularly from the 18th century. The present collecting activities of the library are concentrated on Australian and Asian materials. While very early imprints are now less likely to be collected, the library has a number of collections of scarce and unusual works relating to Asia and the Pacific. This paper provides background on the development of the rare books and manuscripts collection and then describes collections pertaining to the Asia-Pacific area. (Author/MES)

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The National Library of Australia's Rare Book and Manuscripts Collections, with special reference to the Asia-Pacific region

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Abstract

The National Library of Australia has a small but interesting collection of rare books and manuscripts. These collections are the legacy of a remarkable period of growth in the Library's history. Strengths are greatest in British and European materials, particularly from the eighteenth century. The present collecting activities of the Library are concentrated on Australian and Asian materials. While very early imprints are now less likely to be collected, the Library has a number of collections of scarce and unusual works relating to Asia and the Pacific.

Paper

Despite a history of almost one hundred years, the National Library of Australia remains a relatively recent arrival on the scene, especially when compared to some of the great national and university libraries of Europe, North America and other parts of the world. For this reason, and because Australia itself is a new country in terms of writing and publishing, its rare book and manuscript collections are small.

The National Library of Australia had its genesis in the Commonwealth Parliamentary Library. It was established with high ideals and its founders intended it to have large collections. In 1907 the speaker of a library committee reported that it was to be:

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> *a great Public Library on the lines of the world-famed Library of Congress at Washington; such a library, indeed, as shall be worthy of the Australian Nation; the home of the literature, not of a State, or of a period, but of the world, and of all time.*

Unfortunately the budget for 1904-5 was only one thousand pounds, and that of 1906-7 one thousand five hundred pounds, thus the reality fell a little short of the ideal.

Australia's National Library grew slowly at first. Some early gifts gave it volume and substance, although its character remained largely that of a gentleman's library rather than that of a research library. Small numbers of staff and the depression of the nineteen thirties meant that further development was modest. During the Second World War, demands made upon the Library revealed that there was a serious weakness in materials covering Asia and the Pacific. This was corrected with the establishment of offices for library acquisitions in London (1943) and New York (1946), followed by an increase in library staff (1947-48). The National Library then embarked on a remarkable period of rapid and systematic growth to develop its collections and attain to a status befitting a national library.

Rare books and manuscripts form a relatively small part of the National Library's collections. Generally speaking, most of the Library's current collecting is now centred on Australian printed and original materials. Material collected from overseas is largely from the immediate geographical region, and is concentrated on the contemporary scene or on the more modern periods of history, economics and politics.

An increasing emphasis on Asia and the Pacific began after World War 2, but for much of this century the Library's collecting also gave great weight to British and European civilisation. During this time Australia continued to regard itself as an outpost of the British Empire, and saw its culture and institutions as being based firmly upon European and specifically British traditions. This view informed much of the Library's collecting from 1900-1980.

The Library was very fortunate in being active in collecting during three decades (1950-1980) when individual rare items and large formed collections were often available on the market for very reasonable amounts. In addition, as a developing national institution, the Library was often able to draw on the good will and public spiritedness of donors and benefactors. By 1980 the large-scale collecting period of the Library was over. Prices for rare materials and large formed collections or scholar's libraries came to be beyond the Library's financial reach. With the development of a very lucrative second hand market, donors or their heirs were more likely to turn to the book trade than to a public institution. Australia does not have a well-developed network of foundations or endowments that may often assist libraries elsewhere with expensive purchases.

Nevertheless, the National Library of Australia does have a collection of rare books, which although small, is of interest and has strengths in several areas. There are estimated to be about 55,000 original items in the Library's collection with publication dates before 1801. Of necessity, the Library has supplemented these holdings with large sets of microfilm and microfiche that extend the general reach of the collection. As with most of its collections, the difficulty of cataloguing these rapidly acquired materials were a continuing problem for a number of years. Although some are still to be fully catalogued, progress over the past few years has been steady and it is estimated that around 50% of the Library's rare books are now catalogued with machine-readable records. Current cataloguing effort is being directed towards French and Dutch early imprints, and when completed later this financial year, it will mean that about 65% of the collection will be accessible via machine-readable records. Progress is therefore slow but steady. A separate initiative, the European Microform Project headed by the University of Adelaide has been obtaining and commissioning cataloguing records for items in microform sets, and some of this work has led to making early imprints on microfilm much more visible.

Rare books from Great Britain form the greatest strength of the Library's collection. A number of scholarly and family libraries were acquired to build and develop the collection. A number of books, pamphlets and manuscripts assembled by Leon Kashnor, proprietor of the Museum Bookstore in London as a personal collection was among the earliest collections obtained by the Library. This collection of over 12,000 items on the political economy of Great Britain and Ireland from 1650 to 1870 contains a number of rare works and editions of the early economists. Of varied provenance, some of the material comes from the library of William Wyndham Grenville (1759-1834), some from the Townshend family, some from Holland House, and the collection includes an interesting group of over 100 rare Chartist pamphlets. The collection was further enriched by many rarities from the great houses of England, Ireland and Scotland. A great strength of the collection is its accumulation of the works of both major and minor British and Irish political economists from the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

Two family libraries, that of the Clifford family of Ugbrooke Park and the De Vesci family of Ireland were acquired in the nineteen-sixties. The Clifford Collection consisting of upwards of 10,000 books, 1,500 pamphlets and a small collection of manuscripts is rich in printed works from the sixteenth century onwards, with especial strength in the seventeenth century. Political, legal economic and ecclesiastical titles are prominent, and there are some early editions of note among the literary works. There is much French writing, and as a prominent Catholic family, extensive material on the special position of Catholics in England. Some early illuminated works are included. The De Vesci collection was in part assembled by John Vesey (1638-1716), an Archbishop of Triam in Ireland, and his son Sir Thomas Vesey, Lord Knapton, who became Bishop of Ossory in 1714 and died in 1730. A number of incunabula and sixteenth and seventeenth century editions are included in the collection, while the subject matter ranges over religion and classics. This collection contains the Library's oldest complete printed book: a 1478 Venice edition of Jacobus de Voragine's Legenda aurea, or 'Golden Legend'.

The National Library has considerable strengths in eighteenth century works. In 1962 it was fortunate in acquiring the working collection of Professor David Nichol Smith of Merton College, Oxford. About half of this collection of some 8,000 books and 1,500 pamphlets was published before 1800. The main strength of this collection is in the great range of first and early editions of prominent and minor writers of the Restoration period and the eighteenth century. Dryden, Defoe, Swift, Pope, Boswell and Johnson are most strongly represented, but there are many examples of practically every writer of that time. A large number of literary journals, usually in original first folio editions and Shakespeareana are also well represented.

English philology is well represented in the rare book collection and two collections, that of Dr C.T. Onions (1873-1965) and Dr R.C. Alston have added valuable early editions. Dr Onions was one of the four editors of the New English dictionary on historical principles, first published 1888-1928 and reissued as the Oxford English dictionary in 1933. In his collection are included a number of works from the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as well as more modern works. Both collections contain books that are the only known copies, or else extremely scarce.

Turning to rare books from other European countries, it is in materials from France, the Netherlands and Portugal that the Library has its strongest collections. One of the most interesting collections consists of twelve thousand pamphlets dating from the era of the French Revolution. It consists largely of rare local official material such as tracts, pamphlets, ordinances, letters, edicts, proclamations, bills, minutes, reports and lawsuits relating to the Convention and meetings of members of parliament. The collection is similar but in no way inferior to the Talleyrand Collection of the New York Public Library or the Melvin Collection at the University of Kansas in the United States. It contains material not found in the American collections and is a prime research resource for scholars of the period. The collection is supplemented by other contemporary materials, fairly complete sets of several of the more

important periodicals of the time and another contemporary collection on the Revolution in the French colonies. A related collection contains 135 books and pamphlets that were banned in France during the 17th and 18th centuries. These publications give insight into the ideological trends and conflicts from which the French Revolution grew. Works by both major and minor writers are included, with Voltaire particularly well represented, and there are many decrees banning specific works.

Early imprints from the Netherlands are represented by several pamphlet collections covering the period 1567-1852, and documenting many aspects of this remarkable and significant period in the history of the Netherlands.

Surprisingly perhaps, early Portuguese materials have found their way into the National Library's rare book collections. As part of a collection acquired from the Valente family and strong in eighteenth century works, there is a unique selection of Portuguese drama of the last three centuries, possibly only surpassed by the holdings of the National Library of Portugal and the University of Coimbra. A further collection spanning the entire range of Portuguese and Brazilian theatre from their beginnings to the mid-twentieth century adds to the strength in this subject. The Valente collection also contains works on literature, history, art, bibliography, music, folklore, canon law, civil law, theology and politics, attesting to the wide-ranging interests of this family over the years.

Works by early printers and presses are also held in the Rare Books Collection. These include Wynkyn de Worde's printing of Caxton's translation of the Legenda aurea, by Jacobus de Voragine (1529), Jean de Tourne's printing of L'Eneide de Virgile (1560), Hartmann Schedel's Liber cronicarum ("The Nuremberg Chronicle", 1493) and Werner Rolewinck's Fasciculus temporum (1484). A single leaf from the Gutenberg Bible (1455-1456) is also in the collection, as well as a modern facsimile of the complete Gutenberg Bible.

Books from modern presses are also bought as examples of fine typography. Mostly in limited editions, they are indicative of the kind of work being done by creative printers, particularly in the UK and USA. There are examples of the work of presses such as the Kelmscott, Nonesuch, Golden Cockerel, Lion and Unicorn, Rampant Lions, Dolmen, Basilisk, World's End, Whittington, Bird and Bull, and of the work of Hans Mardersteig, William Pickering and the Folio Society. Modern facsimiles of early manuscript and printed works such as the Book of Kells and the Gutenberg Bible are also in the collection.

The National Library of Australia's Manuscript collection need not detain us long. In the Australian context the Manuscript collection is largely a collection of personal papers which form part of the documentary record of Australian history and society. The collection does include some older papers and documents which have come to the Library as part of larger collections. However the collection's greatest area of strength dates from the 1890s onwards, reflecting the Federation movement and Australia's development as a nation.

Mention should be made of the Map collection. While this collection concentrates on modern Australian mapping and maps of the Asia-Pacific region, it does purchase rare maps where these are of relevance to the history of the European discovery and exploration of Australia. Consequently some interesting early maps are held.

Finally, moving away from a discussion of rare books in the strict sense of pre-1800 imprints, I will turn to some of the Library's collections pertaining to the Asia-Pacific area which contain unusual, interesting or scarce materials.

The Pacific has always been an area of interest to the National Library due to Australia's historical, economic and cultural links with this region. As part of its focus on early European exploration of Australia and its region, the Library has excellent holdings of accounts of voyages and expeditions by Europeans, and a number of early maps of the region. There is also a good collection of the earliest examples of book publishing in many of the Pacific

languages. Published largely by missionary bodies, most of these items are religious texts and writings produced in England, France, Belgium, and occasionally Australia and New Zealand largely during the course of the nineteenth century.

The Library's Asian collections have some unusual and unique materials. The London Missionary Society collection is perhaps a good example of a collection of unusual and at times rare Chinese language works. This collection which was acquired from the London Missionary Society is composed largely of works published in the 19th and early 20th centuries and covers a wide range of subjects, including religion, history, and politics. Included in the collection are a number of pamphlets arising out of the Taiping Rebellion, one of the great upheavals in modern Chinese history, and two original proclamations from Yang Hsiu-ch'ing and other Taiping leaders issued in 1853 at the height of the rebellion. Early Bible translations and other Christian works in Chinese, including over 60 editions of the Old and New Testaments in literary and colloquial Chinese and local dialects feature in the collection. Many of these items are now scarce or rare.

The Library's holdings on Buddhism in Asia are strong, and an historic Buddhist treasure is preserved in the Library's cold store. Its delicate pages are held together in the ancient Chinese manner with waxed orange thread, and enclosed between heavier waxed paper covers. This is the Korean Tripitaka, the Koryo Taejang Gyong, 1,340 volumes of a Korean edition of the Chinese Buddhist canon which, popular legend says, was brought to China from India by the monk, Tripitaka. The volumes are produced from woodblocks dated from 1251, blocks still used by the monks of the Haeinsa Temple in south eastern Korea. The Tripitaka contains 1,524 texts in 6,558 chapters and was first published in AD 1011.

Other parts of Asia are represented by a number of those scholarly formed collections which the Library was so successful in acquiring several decades ago. The collection of Professor Georges Coedes (1886-1970), former Director of L'Ecole francaise d'Extreme Orient, covers the history, archaeology and culture of what was then French Indochina, and is today Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam. It is an outstanding resource and contains many French publications of the early 20th century. Also within the collection is a Khmer language Tripitaka. This is the rarest edition of a number of Buddhist Scriptures held by the Library. It is believed to be one of only a handful remaining after the wholesale destruction of books during the Khmer Rouge regime in Cambodia (1975-1979).

In a similar way the library of G.H. Luce (1889-1979) who was active as a teacher in Rangoon from 1912 to 1964 is rich in works on the history, literature and archaeology of Burma as well as the surrounding countries.

Other notable collections, which contain individually valuable items while adding to the depth of the Library's research collections on Asia, are the Simon collection on Chinese language, the Williams collection on westerners in Japan, the Braga collection on Portuguese and other European activities in Asia, and the Otley Beyer collection on the Philippines and Philippine anthropology.

These collections contain few pre-1800 imprints, but they are particularly valued by the National Library because the Library has gone on to build considerable strengths in collecting historical and contemporary materials from many countries of the Pacific, East Asia and South East Asia. Taken as a whole the Library believes that these resources will provide a valuable legacy to scholarship into the next century and beyond.

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